

"EMERGING TOGETHER"
In Celebration of Asian/Pacific American Heritage Month

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Asian Pacific American Heritage Celebrations

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"EMERGING TOGETHER"
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I. Introduction

A fact that might surprise many people in the United States is that over half of the world's population (58%) is Asian. The U.S. population is becoming increasingly diverse, probably the most diverse in the world. According to the 2000 Census, Asian Pacific Americans are the fastest growing minority group in the country, now comprising over 4% of the population. (However, Hispanics had the largest increase in population from the 1990 Census.)

Like other immigrants who brought their unique culture and heritage to America, Asian Pacific American influence and contributions have permeated almost every facet of American life. Yo-Yo Ma (cellist), I.M. Pei (architect), Norman Y. Mineta (Secretary of Transportation), Elaine Chao (Secretary of Labor), Michael Chang (tennis player), Tiger Woods (pro-golfer), Michelle Kwan (figure skater), Ann Curry ("Today Show" anchor), Jerry Yang (co-founder of Yahoo), Dr. David Ho (Time's Man of the Year in 1996), Gary Locke (Washington governor), Jocelyn Enriquez (hip hop singer), Lucy Liu ("Ally McBeal" actress), Ang Lee (Director of the 2000 Academy Award winner "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon") and Vera Wang (fashion designer) are just some of the Asian Pacific Americans whose names may be familiar to you. There are also achievers in the fields of science, research, medicine, computer science, and technology whose contributions to American life may be well known only to those within their professions. Additionally, there are Asian Pacific Americans whose presence is felt every day by many of us who live in metropolitan areas – the greengrocers and owners of corner delis, drycleaners, Asian restaurants, convenience stores, and other small businesses. For example, in the District of Columbia, the *Washington Post* estimates that two-thirds of the small business licenses are owned by Asian Pacific Americans.

Asian Americans have been a part of American life for over 150 years!
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Despite their tremendous growth in population and contributions to American life, very little is known about Asian Pacific Americans in general. Unlike the federal judiciary, data collected by government agencies on minority groups often lump Asian Pacific Americans into the "other" category or completely overlook them. Further, data collected on Asian Pacific Americans are almost never disaggregated into the individual Asian ethnic groups. It was not until the 2000 Census that Pacific Islanders were broken out from the general Asian category in the census forms. The aggregation of the diverse Asian American and Pacific Islander populations into one category had given rise to objections from some groups, particularly Native Hawaiians in recent years. They pointed out that they are an indigenous people whose ancestors once had their own independent nation, and have little, if anything, in common with persons of Asian ancestry.

The Asian Pacific American community represents over 50 countries and Asian ethnic groups. Asian Pacific Americans are also often seen as foreigners no matter how long they have been in the United States. In reality, the Asian Pacific American community includes not only immigrants and families who have been here a few months but also those whose ancestors arrived over 150 years ago to help build the transcontinental railroad and support the agricultural economies of the West Coast and Hawaii. Asian Pacific Americans are often seen as successful, wealthy, and highly educated. This may be true for some of the more established groups such as Japanese or Chinese Americans, but the perception masks the disparities among different Asian ethnic groups. Some of the newer immigrants -- especially Southeast Asians such as the Vietnamese, Hmong, Cambodians, and Laotians, are disadvantaged and many are struggling to adjust to American life. One important distinction between Southeast Asian Americans and other Asian Pacific Americans is that the majority of Southeast Asians came to America as political refugees from war-torn countries rather than as immigrants who were motivated by economic opportunities.

Asian Pacific American Heritage Month celebrations provide an opportunity for us to educate ourselves about this important segment of American society and remind us that America continues to be a unique place of experimentation as we strive to create a truly multicultural society.

This program is designed to help your understanding of the Asian Pacific American communities living in cities and towns across America. Certainly, not all the characteristics described apply to all members of a particular ethnic group. After all, Asian Pacific Americans born in the U.S. probably have taken on the cultural attributes of their "home" country – the United States!

II. Background of Asian Pacific American Heritage Month

The efforts to establish Asian Pacific American Heritage Month began in 1977 when Representatives Frank Horton (R-NY) and Norman Y. Mineta (D-CA) introduced Pacific/Asian Heritage Week (House Resolution 540) in the House of Representatives. The legislation called upon the President to proclaim the first 10 days of May as Pacific/Asian Heritage Week. In the same year, Senators Daniel Inouye (D-HI) and Spark Matsunaga (D-HI) introduced Senate Joint Resolution 72 in the Senate, similar to the legislation introduced by Reps. Horton and Mineta in the House of Representatives.

Although legislation was passed on July 10, 1978 proclaiming an Asian Pacific American Heritage Week in May, the proclamation had to be renewed annually because the legislation did not contain an annual designation. It was not until October 23, 1992 that President George Bush signed legislation designating May of each year as "Asian Pacific American Heritage Month." The law (HR 5572), introduced by Reps. Horton and Mineta, was approved unanimously by the House of Representatives and the Senate during the 102nd Congress.

III. Overview of Asian Pacific American Immigration to the United States

From the mid-1800's to World War II, Asian immigrants were essential in helping America industrialize. And today, Asian Pacific Americans are helping to move America into the 21st century. Political leaders, policy-makers, and the media are beginning to recognize the importance of the Asian Pacific American community, which will likely grow in numbers and political strength in the 21st Century.

A. The Chinese Workers During the Gold Rush and the Building of the Transcontinental Railroad

In the mid- to late 19th century, Asian immigrants came to the United States for gold and to support the growing agricultural and railway industries. When gold was first discovered at Sutter's Mill in 1848, fewer than a hundred Chinese, mostly merchants and traders, were living in California. Word quickly spread in China and many men made their journeys across the ocean hoping to make their fortunes in "Gold Mountain," their name for America. To this day, the Chinese translation for "San Francisco" is "Gold Mountain." By 1860, there were approximately 41,000 Chinese in the United States. At first, the Chinese were welcomed and even recruited during the Gold Rush as cheap labor. Many obtained high-interest loans or agreed to work for a number of years to pay their passage to America. But in 1850, California imposed a foreign miner's tax and enforced it mainly against Chinese miners, who often had to pay more than once. Eventually the tax became a complete ban against Chinese miners (Sucheng Chan, *Asian Americans, an Interpretive History* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1991).

Since the mid-1800's, Asian immigrants have been essential to America's agricultural and industrial growth.

Expelled from the gold mining fields, the Chinese found work building the transcontinental railroad. Chinese workers constructed the western half of the first transcontinental railroad, deemed critical to linking the established and emerging U.S. markets and providing a gateway to the Pacific. As discussed in greater detail below, anti-Chinese sentiment led to the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, not only banning Chinese immigration but also denying citizenship to legal residents. By 1910, about 70,000 Chinese lived in the United States.

B. Japanese, Filipino, Korean and Indian Agricultural Workers

Around the same time that the gates to America were closed to the Chinese, the desire for cheap labor introduced in consecutive stages Japanese, Indian, Korean and Filipino workers. In the late 19th century, Japanese and Filipino laborers were hired to work on farms, mostly in California in response to the chronic labor shortage in the agricultural industry. Asians provided agricultural labor not only to the West Coast but also in Hawaii. Hawaiian agriculture was largely dependent on Japanese and Filipino farm workers because the native Hawaiians were too few to be an adequate labor force.

They supplemented the Chinese workforce who settled there before the imposition of the Chinese Exclusion Act. Korea offered yet another pool of agricultural labor as political unrest caused by Japanese aggression drove many Koreans into exile. This resulted in an influx of Koreans in the early 1900's, mostly to work on the plantations in Hawaii.

In the early 1900's there were only about 2,000 Asian Indians in the United States. Many were professionals, students, and merchants. Later, Asian Indian immigrants from the Punjab region were recruited to supplement the earlier waves of Chinese and Japanese agricultural workers.

Like the Chinese, immigrants from Japan, Korea, and India began to experience a backlash as their numbers increased. The Alien Land Law of 1913 prevented anyone of Asian ancestry from owning land, and *Ozawa v. United States* (260 U.S. 178.43 S.Ct. 65, 67 L.Ed. 199 (1992)) barred Japanese from becoming a citizens. The gates closed for Japanese, Koreans, and Indians with the passage of the Immigration Act of 1924, which barred anyone ineligible for citizenship from immigrating to the United States. Approximately 275,000 Japanese had immigrated within the 30-year span before the law was passed.

C. Filipinos Not Covered by the Immigration Act of 1924

The last significant migration from Asia came from the Philippines. Since the Philippines was a U.S. territory and its residents were U.S. nationals, they were the only Asians eligible for immigration after the passage of the Immigration Act of 1924. Filipinos came to the United States mostly as contract laborers in Hawaii and as college students on scholarships established by the United States when it annexed the Philippines. Between 1920 and 1929, approximately 50,000 Filipinos immigrated to the United States. This surge in population was halted with the passage of the Tydings-McDuffie Act of 1934, converting the Philippines into a commonwealth. Filipinos were reclassified as aliens and prohibited from applying for citizenship. Only 50 Filipinos from any nation of origin were allowed to immigrate to the United States in any given year, except for plantation labor to Hawaii. Those Filipinos in Hawaii were not permitted to move to the continental U.S.

D. Growth of U.S. Born Asian Pacific American Population

In the early 1930's, when immigration slowed, there were almost half a million Asians living in the United States. Like struggling immigrants from other countries, they found work wherever they could---often at the bottom of the economic ladder. In addition to the railroads and the plantations in Hawaii and the West Coast, Asian immigrants helped build many of the vineyards in California and provided labor to emerging manufacturing industries. In the western states, Filipino workers helped shape the American labor movement, forming alliances with Mexican and white workers. In 1936, Filipino farm worker activists initiated a strike that laid the foundation for Cesar Chavez's United Farm Workers movement.

Successive generations of U.S. born Asian Pacific Americans became better educated and were able to advance farther than their parents on the rungs of the economic ladder. As mentioned below, they combined with the post-1965 influx of immigrants to create the Asian Pacific American middle class.

E. Easing of Immigration Restrictions After the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965 Leads to Influx of Skilled Workers

When Asian immigration was severely restricted in the first half of the 20th century, the growth of the Asian Pacific American population was through U.S.- born Asian Pacific Americans. It was not until 1965, with the passage of the Immigration and Naturalization Act, that Congress eliminated the final vestiges of the anti-immigration laws. Since then there has been a dramatic growth in the Asian Pacific American population. See section V. below for the current growth trends.

The second wave of Asian immigration produced by this relaxation of restrictive immigration laws was heavily Chinese, Filipino, South Asian, and Southeast Asian. Only the Japanese American population, which was the largest group in 1970, has not grown substantially during the past three decades.

Post-1965 immigration was different from the earlier Asian immigration in significant ways. Unlike the majority of Asian immigrants in the 1800's to the early 1900's, who were primarily agricultural and railroad workers, the post-1965 group consisted of persons who were skilled and were admitted based on their potential economic contributions to this nation. Many entered the U.S. under occupational preferences, resulting in a high percentage of college-educated immigrants. These more recent immigrants, along with the highly educated second-generation Asian Pacific Americans mentioned above, have formed the backbone of the significant Asian Pacific American middle class.

The immigration preference given to skilled workers has helped create an Asian Pacific American population that differs from the majority population in key respects. Asian Pacific Americans, on average, are slightly better educated than white Americans. Asian Pacific Americans, again on average, also may have household incomes equal to or slightly higher than the incomes of white Americans. See census information in section V below for a more detailed discussion of Asian Pacific American demographics. Also, see the "*Important Milestones in Asian Pacific American History*" segment .

F. Influx of Refugees After the Vietnam War

Vietnam, located South of China on the Indochina peninsula, was occupied by the Chinese for 1,000 years (11B.C.-A.D. 939), followed by 900 years of independence under 8 different dynasties (A.D. 939-1883), and then by seventy years of French colonial rule (1883-1945). After World War II, Vietnam experienced 30 years of almost continuous warfare. From 1946 to 1954, the nationalist Vietminh headed by Ho Chi Minh, fought for control over the newly created Democratic Republic of Vietnam against

the French, who withdrew military forces following the *Geneva Accords* which partitioned the country along the 17th parallel. The communist North Vietnamese waged guerilla warfare against the anti-Communist South Vietnamese in an effort to reunify the country.

Prompted by fears that a North Vietnamese victory would lead to further Communist takeovers in Southeast Asia, the United States sent military advisers to Vietnam in 1962 followed by combat troops in 1965.

By the time the U.S. pulled out of Vietnam in 1975, it is estimated that the war had cost 50,000 American lives and 3 million Vietnamese lives. Over 5 million Vietnamese became refugees.

In 1973, the U.S. involvement in Vietnam came to an end when it signed the Paris Peace Treaty. In 1975, the United States withdrew its troops and advisers from Laos, South Vietnam and Cambodia. The North Vietnamese government took over South Vietnam by invasion with armed forces. The Khmer Rouge regime took over Cambodia. Then the communist

movement, financed and supported by the North Vietnamese and Russian governments, took over Laos by invasion with armed forces and formed the Lao People's Democratic Republic.

The first wave of 130,000 refugees (roughly 125,000 of them Vietnamese) left Southeast Asia in spring 1975. They were first airlifted by the U.S. government to the Philippines and Guam and then to one of the refugee centers in the United States (Fort Chaffee, Arkansas; Camp Pendleton, California; Eglin Air Base, Florida; or Fort Indiantown Gap, Pennsylvania). This group included dependents of U.S. servicemen and those with sponsors already living in this country. The second wave of Vietnamese refugees began during 1978 and lasted through the mid-1980's. These were the "boat people," who took to sea in rickety, overcrowded boats.

Between 1975 and 1995, it is estimated that the Lao's People's Democratic Republic killed over 300,000 people in Laos. Laotians who had helped the United States during the Vietnam War began immigrating to the United States in large numbers in the mid 1970's. From 1975-1994, approximately 263,000 Laotian refugees made their way to the United States.

The Hmong in the U.S. came mainly from Laos as refugees after the Vietnam War. Many had been recruited by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to fight in the once-secret wars in Laos. Upon the collapse of the Laotian government supported by the U.S., the new government marked the Hmong for genocidal extinction. Many of the Hmong fled from invaders and from chemical weapons, losing many lives as they traveled through the jungle and swam the Mekong river to Thailand. Unlike the one hundred and thirty thousand Vietnamese who were evacuated in late April 1975 by the Americans and allowed into the United States under the "parole" power of the U.S. Attorney General, the Hmong and other ethnic groups from Laos did not win that privilege until December 1975, when Congress admitted 3,466 Hmong under parole. By the early 1980's, some fifty thousand Hmong had been resettled in the United States.

The successful resettlement of these Southeast Asian groups can be largely attributed to the efforts of voluntary agencies, many associated with church groups, who arranged for sponsorship of the refugees to provide food, clothing and shelter as they settled in. They have settled in just about every state in the country, but a large number of Vietnamese settled in California and Texas; Hmong populations tend to be concentrated in Minnesota and Wisconsin.

IV. Laws Affecting Asian Pacific American Immigration and Citizenship

A. Early Anti-Asian Laws

As previously mentioned, the mid-1800's witnessed a large influx of Asian immigrants, mostly Chinese, into the United States. As the number of Asian immigrants increased and they made the transition to small business and farming, rising tensions led to the portrayal of Chinese as the "yellow peril."

Anti-Asian sentiment was so strong that Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, barring all Chinese laborers from entering the U.S. and prohibiting naturalization for those already here. This act was the first ban on immigration based on nationality. In 1889, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of the Chinese Exclusion Act in *Chae Chan Ping v. U.S.* (130 U.S. 581, 9 S.Ct. 623, 32 L.Ed. 1068 (1889)). The Court deferred to the government's sovereign power to deport alien residents, and recognized national security concerns in protecting the country's labor force from the "scourge of the yellow people." The Act caused many Chinese families to be separated for decades.

Other examples of anti-immigration laws include:

- Even after a 1907 law allowing only white persons to become citizens was amended to include African Americans, similar legislation to include Asian Pacific Americans was rejected. It was not until 1952, with the passage of the McCarran-Walter Act, that naturalization eligibility was extended to all races and ethnicities.
- In 1907, Japan and the U.S. reached a "Gentlemen's Agreement" whereby Japan stopped issuing passports to Japanese laborers desiring to emigrate to the U.S.
- In 1917, a law was passed barring immigration from most Asian countries other than Japan.
- The Immigration Act of 1924 essentially barred all Asian immigration by banning admission of persons ineligible for citizenship.
- States, particularly Washington and California, also actively targeted Asian immigrants. For example, in the early 1900's, Washington and California passed laws prohibiting persons ineligible for citizenship from purchasing land. These

laws were designed to discourage the immigration of Japanese who might wish to farm land in the U.S.

The culmination of institutionally condoned discriminatory treatment of Asian Pacific Americans occurred on February 19, 1942. On that date, after the bombing of Pearl Harbor by the Japanese and the entry of the U.S. into World War II, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066. Shortly thereafter, all U.S. citizens of Japanese descent were prohibited from living, working, or traveling on the West Coast of the United States. Without due process of law, 120,000 Americans of Japanese ancestry were evacuated to internment camps in desolate areas of the U.S. and were incarcerated there, many for the duration of the war.

B. Repeal and Reparations

Ironically, in the climate of strong anti-Japanese sentiment created by World War II, efforts by Chinese American groups led to the repeal of the Chinese Exclusion Act. During World War II, China became a strong ally of the United States. In fact, a few weeks after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, *Time* magazine published an article with instructions on how to distinguish Chinese “friends” from Japanese “enemies.” Taking advantage of the shift in sentiment, Chinese American groups, assisted by the “China lobby,” a small group of Chinese sympathizers and members of Congress, successfully lobbied Congress to overturn the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1943.

More recently, to atone for the injustice to the Japanese Americans who were interned during World War II, the Civil Liberties Act of 1988 was passed by Congress and signed by President Ronald Reagan on August 10, 1988. The Act provided for a redress payment of \$20,000 and a letter of apology from the President of the United States to each surviving internee. The Act also established the Civil Liberties Education Fund to sponsor research and public educational activities so that the events surrounding the Japanese internment will be remembered and its causes may be better understood.

C. More Recent Laws Affecting the Status of Asian Pacific Americans

The U.S. defeat in Vietnam triggered a large influx of war refugees, beginning with the Vietnamese and Hmong who had been America’s allies. The Indochina Migration and Refugee Assistance Act of 1975 established a program of resettlement for refugees who fled from Cambodia and Vietnam, allowing up to 200,000 Southeast Asians to enter the United States under special “parole” status that exempted them from the normal immigration process. Congress also passed \$405 million in resettlement aid to assist the refugees. One year later, the Immigration Act of 1976 made Laotians eligible for the same refugee resettlement programs.

The Federal Voting Rights Language Assistance Act of 1992 made the availability of bilingual ballots more widespread. However, the “English Only” movement has sought to establish English as the official language of all government business. For example, in 1984 California voters passed an initiative to require all voting materials and ballots to be published only in English.

V. Rapid Growth of the Asian Pacific American Population

A. Background on Asian Pacific American Data

“Asian Pacific American” refers to persons having origins in any of the original peoples of Asia or the Pacific Islands. The term obviously subsumes an enormous amount of diversity in culture, history, immigration status, languages spoken, religion, and other factors. There may be vast differences among various Asian Pacific American communities depending on their geographical locations, paths of immigration, and levels of acculturation. We have provided a general overview of the specific ethnic groups in section VI. For more information about the culture, religions, festivals, languages, and customs of Asian ethnic groups, please visit www.asianamculture.about.com.

Although the state-by-state information from Census 2000 is now available, there has not been a cross-state analysis of data by race. Also, disaggregated data for the Asian and the Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander categories will not be released until later this year. A direct comparison with the 1990 Census is also difficult because 2000 Census respondents were allowed for the first time to identify one or more races to indicate their racial identity, resulting in a total of 63 racial categories.

Analysis of data on Asian Pacific Americans is complicated not only by the difficulty of cross-comparisons between 1990 and 2000 census data, but by the fact that the data are often incomplete.

The Interim Report of the President’s Advisory Commission on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders found that in much of the data collected and used by the federal government, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders were invisible, relegated to a residual

According to the 2000 interim report of the President’s Advisory Commission on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, *Interim Report to the President and the Nation: A People Looking Forward* (“The Interim Report”), Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders have been “MIH” - “Missing In History” as taught in classrooms, as reflected in the media and the arts, and as understood by government policymakers and program planners.

category of “Other.” When data about Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders were available at all, the data were often contradictory or self-canceling when aggregated and often misanalyzed. The Interim Report also noted that Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders often remain a footnote or asterisk as part of the broad “Asian American and Pacific Islander” category, ignoring their importance as diverse, indigenous peoples. The 2000 Census marks the first time that the “Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islanders” category has been disaggregated from the general “Asian” category.

For the reasons cited above, most of the statistics presented in sections I-IV relate to Asian Pacific Americans as a whole, and at times the data presented below on Asian Pacific American subgroups will vary depending on the information available from the 1990 and 2000 census, the Interim Report, and various other sources.

B. Asian Pacific Americans are the Fastest Growing Minority Group in the U.S.

According to Census Bureau figures for 2000, the Asia Pacific American population is estimated at 11 million, or 3.7 % of the total United States population. The total population of Asian Pacific Americans jumped to a range of 10.5 million to 12.8 million, a 48.3% increase from 7.3 million a decade ago. But including those whose race is Asian and one or more other races leads to a total Asian Pacific American population of 11.9 million, which would be a 72.2% jump from the size of the

Asian Pacific Americans remain the fastest growing racial/ethnic population in the U.S., increasing 95% from 1980-1990 and 45% from 1990-1999.

Asian Pacific American population in 1990.

Though still a small portion of the population, Asian Pacific Americans are the fastest growing minority group in the country, strengthening their numbers in enclaves and spreading thinly across many states. Although 80% of Asian Pacific Americans reside in 10 states (California, New York, Hawaii, Texas, New Jersey, Illinois, Washington, Florida, Virginia and Massachusetts), the fastest growing Asian American and Pacific Islander populations are in Georgia, Nevada, North Carolina, Nebraska, Arizona, Delaware and New Mexico. The Asian American and Pacific Islander population is expected to reach 37.6 million persons, or comprise 9% of the U.S. population, by the year 2050. (*U.S. Census Bureau, 1999 and 2000; Department of Health and Human Services, 1999; Urban Institute Metropolitan Housing and Communities Center, 2000*). Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders had a higher rate of population growth between April 1, 1990, and July 1, 1999, than any other race or ethnic group: 45% (<http://www.census.gov/population/estimates/nation/intfile3-1.txt>).

C. Trends and Observations about Asian Pacific Americans

The following trends and observations about the current Asian Pacific American population have their roots in immigration history, which is discussed in detail in sections III and IV above.

The Majority of Asian Pacific Americans Reside in the Western United States and Live in Urban Areas.

According to the 1999 Census Bureau Population Estimates Program, the states with the highest numbers of Asian Pacific Americans were California, New York, Hawaii, Texas, and New Jersey.

In 1999, most Asian Pacific Americans resided in the western U.S. (53 %). As discussed previously in sections III and IV, Hawaii and the West were the early gateways of immigration for Asian Pacific Americans.

About 96% of Asian Pacific Americans resided in metropolitan areas, with 45% in cities and 52% in suburbs (*U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census. (May 5, 2000) [2000b]. "Census Bureau Facts for Features: Asian Pacific American Heritage Month: May 1-31," http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/2000/cb00-ff05.html*). In 1998, California had 3.9 million Asian Pacific Americans, more than any other state. New York was second with 995,000, followed by Hawaii with 757,000,

Texas with 556,000, and New Jersey with 453,000 (*U.S. Department of Commerce, 2000b*). The five metropolitan areas with the highest population of Asian Pacific Americans were: Los Angeles-Riverside-Orange County, California (1.8 million); New York-Northern New Jersey-Long Island, New York (1.3 million); San Francisco-Oakland-San Jose, California (1.3 million); Honolulu, Hawaii (566,000); and Washington, D.C.-Baltimore, Maryland (373,000) (*U.S. Department of Commerce, 2000b*).

Please see *Asian Pacific American Population By State* for the state-by-state comparison of Asian Pacific American populations according to the 1999 Population Estimate Program of the U.S. Census Bureau.

As of 1997, about 60% of Asian Pacific Americans in the U.S. were born in another country.

The Majority of Asian Pacific Americans Are Foreign-Born. Since the advent of the 1965 immigration law that allowed more Asians to come to the U.S., the Asian Pacific American population has “changed from a largely U.S.-born population to a predominantly foreign-born population of new immigrants and refugees who speak a language other than English” (*Hune, S. and Chan, K. S. (2000). “Educating Asian Pacific Americans: Struggles and Progress.” In T.P. Fong and L. H. Shinagawa (eds.), Asian Americans: Experiences and Perspectives. Prentice-Hall*). The median length of residence of those who were foreign-born was 11.6 years, and 44 % were naturalized citizens. Most foreign-born Asian Pacific Americans were from the Philippines, China, and Vietnam (*U.S. Department of Commerce, 2000b*). The Philippines, China and Vietnam were among the 10 leading countries of birth of the foreign-born population in 1997. (<http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/1999/cb99-195.html>)

The Asian Pacific American Population is Young. Again, because of the large influx of Asian Pacific Americans after 1965 compared to the trickle of Asian immigrants in the 50-year period prior to 1965, the Asian Pacific American population is relatively young. In 1999, children under 18 comprised 29% of all Asian Pacific Americans, while persons over 65 were only 7% of that total. The comparable numbers for whites were 24% under 18 and 14% over 65 (*U.S. Department of Commerce, 2000b*).

The Asian Pacific American “Success” Statistics Mask Socioeconomic Problems within the Community. Many may view Asian Pacific Americans as a “model minority” because of their high academic achievement, earnings, and success. However, examination of the realities behind the stereotypic leads to a less rosy picture.

a. The Diversity of the Asian Pacific American Community Should Not Be Overlooked. As noted previously, the Asian Pacific American community is extraordinarily diverse. It includes persons whose ancestors were indigenous to territories that are now U.S.-controlled, such as Native Hawaiians, American Samoans, and Guamanians; refugees from war-torn countries such as Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia; fourth- and fifth-generation Americans of Japanese and Chinese ancestry;

highly educated immigrants from the Philippines, India, Hong Kong, and Taiwan and their relatively privileged children; Korean immigrants who own small businesses; and many others.

b. The Educational Attainment of Asian Pacific Americans Varies by Groups. As discussed in sections III and IV, immigration laws affecting Asian Pacific Americans, especially post-1965, favored those immigrants with skills or those who could fill job shortages in the United States. For example, many Filipinos who immigrated to the United States after 1965 are doctors and nurses, and Indian Americans are highly represented in the medical, scientific, and technology fields. Thus, it is not surprising that the educational attainment of Asian Pacific Americans is the highest in the country.

In 1999, 42% of Asian Pacific Americans age 25 or older had a bachelor's degree or higher, whereas only 28% of whites age 25 or older could say the same (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2000b). About 70% of Asian Pacific Americans age 18 to 21 attended college in 1998, versus half of whites (*U.S. Department of Commerce, 2000b*). Asian Pacific Americans received 10% of the doctorates conferred by the nation's colleges and universities, including 22% of the doctorates in engineering and 21% of those in computer sciences (*U.S. Department of Commerce, 2000b*). These are extremely high percentages, considering that Asian Pacific Americans represent only 4% of the population of the United States.

However, the educational attainment of different Asian Pacific American groups varies widely. For example, the 1990 census showed that 88% of Japanese but only 31% of Hmong had graduated from high school. Among Pacific Islanders, those with a high school diploma ranged from 64% of Tongans to 80% of Hawaiians (*U.S. Department of Labor, Women's Bureau. (June 1998). "Facts about Asian American and Pacific Islander Women," www.dol.gov/dol/wb/public/wb_pubs/asian97.htm*).

The high levels of education attained by Asian Pacific Americans have been only partially translated into earnings and occupational status. Census Bureau figures from the 1997-1999 March Current Population Survey indicate that Asian Pacific Americans earn slightly less per year (\$32,000) than whites (\$33,200), and that while 19% of whites are in management positions, only 15% of Asian Pacific Americans hold those jobs (*Ong, P. M. (2000). "The Affirmative Action Divide." In P. M. Ong (ed.), Transforming Race Relations, pp. 313-361. Los Angeles, CA: LEAP Asian Pacific American Public Policy Institute and UCLA Asian American Studies Center*).

c. Asian Pacific Americans' High Median Household Income Is Distributed Among More Household Members. Asian Pacific Americans had the highest median household income of any racial group in 1998: \$46,637, as compared to \$42,439 for whites, \$25,351 for African Americans, and \$28,330 for Hispanics (*U.S. Department of Commerce, 1999b, p. 24*). However, the income per household member among Asian Pacific Americans was lower than

that for whites, since there were 3.15 people in Asian Pacific American households and only 2.47 people in white households (*U.S. Department of Commerce, 2000b*).

According to the 1990 census, the median income of Japanese, Indian, Filipino and Chinese American families exceeded that of the general population, but Koreans lagged slightly behind, while Vietnamese, Cambodians and Laotians fell well below the national level. The median family incomes of the top two groups, Japanese and Indian Americans, almost tripled those of the bottom two, Cambodians and Laotians (*Yin, X. (May 7, 2000). "Asian Americans: The Two Sides of America's 'Model Minority.'" Los Angeles Times, p. M1*).

d. Asian Pacific Americans Have the Lowest Poverty Rate Among Minorities, But Concentrations of Poverty Exist Throughout the Community. About 1.4 million Asian Pacific Americans, or 12.5%, were poor in 1998. For whites the poverty rate was 8.2%; for African Americans, 26.1%; for Hispanics, 25.6% (*U.S. Department of Commerce, 1999a, b*).

While the poverty rates for Japanese, Filipino and Indian Americans were 3.4%, 5.2% and 7.2%, respectively, in 1990, 24% of Vietnamese, 42% of Cambodians and 62% of Hmong lived below the poverty line (*Yin, 2000, p. M1*).

While the overall U.S. poverty rate in 1990 was 13.1%, and the poverty rate for all Asian Pacific Americans was 14.1%, Pacific Islanders and Southeast Asians experienced poverty at much higher levels: Pacific Islander, 17.1%; Vietnamese, 25.7%; Laotian, 34.7%; Cambodian, 42.6%; and Hmong, 63.6% (*Hune and Chan, 1996-97, p. 49*).

e. Over a Third Of Asian Pacific Americans Are Linguistically Isolated.

Often the well-publicized successes of the earlier Asian immigrants who have succeeded in America overshadow the plight of those who are still struggling to adjust to their new country. According to the 1990 Census, approximately 35% of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders live in linguistically-isolated households, in which none of the individuals aged 14 years or older speak English "very well." Sixty-one percent of Hmong American households, 56% of Cambodian American households, 41% of Korean American households, and 40% of Chinese American households are linguistically isolated. (*The Interim Report, 7*). The linguistic isolation of these Asian ethnic groups should be an important consideration for public policymakers as they evaluate the need for specific outreach and assistance to limited English-proficient members of the population.

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